

Water System Plans

Background

In the early 1970's the Department of Health (DOH) created a comprehensive water utility planning program. This was in recognition that planning is a critical management activity of all water utilities. The principal goal of the program is to ensure the efficient use of available resources, and the orderly growth of utilities, while maintaining reliable delivery of high quality water. An essential component of the planning process is the individual water system plan (WSP).

Public Health Issues

In order to protect the public's health, the Department of Health must ensure that an adequate quantity of water, both legally and from a resource standpoint, is available to meet ongoing water demands. This is accomplished through the process of approving new public water systems or expansions to existing systems.

Adequate water quantity and reliability is necessary to ensure that basic public health needs such as drinking, bathing and toilet flushing can be met on an uninterrupted basis. Adequate quantity and reliability of source is also necessary in order to assure that other unsafe (non-potable) water sources are not used in a manner that threatens public health. Finally, adequate quantity and reliability of source is needed to ensure that pressure exists in the system to prevent backflow contamination and ensure that fireflow needs are met.

A Water System Plan helps public water systems identify present and future needs, and determine how these needs can be met. Completing the Plan helps ensure that any expansion of the system will not adversely affect the quality and quantity of water provided, and that sufficient revenue can be generated to pay for necessary improvements.

Key Points

- An individual Water System Plan is a comprehensive planning document required of selected water systems. A WSP represents a system's attempt to identify, schedule, implement and measure the impact of capital and non-capital (e.g., facilities and activities) system needs for a given time period.
- The Water System Plan must be consistent with local land use plans, such as the comprehensive land use plans being developed under the Growth Management Act. If the system is located within a critical water supply service area, the plan must also be consistent with the Coordinated Water System Plan.
- WAC 246.290.100 sets forth requirements regarding who must submit a WSP. These include all public water systems having one thousand or more connections, any public water system experiencing problems, and all new or expanding systems.
- Water System Plans must be updated and submitted to the department every

six years, and must cover a twenty year horizon. DOH also requires a plan prior to approving project reports or construction documents, unless the proposed project is needed to correct an existing public health emergency.

- Water System Plans are used by:
 - the Department of Ecology, when considering a utility's proposal for new or expanded water rights;
 - the Utilities and Transportation Commission, when considering a regulated utility's proposed rates; and
 - the Public Works Trust Fund, when considering a utility's application for a loan.

Conclusions

Water System Plans are required of selected public water systems. They provide a basis for identifying existing and future system needs and comprehensively addressing those needs. They provide an avenue for ensuring ongoing compliance with state, federal and local regulations, demonstrating the need for new or expanded water rights, justifying future rates, and justifying proposed government loans.

More Information

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